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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION REPORT - Situation in Occupied Territories
Conflict Management - North Korea - Iran
PARIS - Tuesday, June 27, 2006

(A) SUBJECTS COVERED IN TODAY'S REPORT:

Situation in Occupied Territories
Conflict Management - North Korea - Iran

B) SUMMARY OF COVERAGE:

Today's headlines and editorials are overwhelmingly devoted to President Chirac's interview last night on France 2 television, and the second lead story is this evening's France-Spain World Cup soccer match. Le Figaro's editorial, entitled "Chirac, Like Zidane," (France's star player about to retire) brings both stories together as Alexis Brezet writes: "Like Zidane, Chirac won it all, but it was a long time ago. Like Zidane, Chirac is getting ready to call it a day... Yet the President showed last evening that again, like Zidane, he does not want to change team players: the first reason for his surprise intervention was reasserting his support for PM Villepin..." Brezet concludes that for Chirac, his legacy will be "entirely different, depending on whether the Socialists or his party wins the next presidential election."

International news is dominated by the kidnapping of the Israeli soldier by Hamas and Israel's threat of retaliation; Al-Qaeda's escalation in violence as demonstrated by the Internet pictures of the execution of the Russian hostages; and Washington's response to North Korea: Le Figaro reports that "Washington wants to deploy Patriots in Japan." In Les Echos, senior editorialist Jacques Hubert-Rodier pens an op-ed on conflict management. (See Part C)

Embedded with NATO troops in Afghanistan by the Embassy Press Office in Paris, Le Figaro's Adrien Jaulmes writes a one-page report on "The Elusive Taliban of Kandahar." "Operation 'Assault Mountain' is supposed to inflict a decisive blow to the Taliban in Southern Afghanistan. But despite the strikes and some victories, the students in religion have taken a foothold on the doorstep of Kandahar, their former capital... The coalition's offensive is supposed to 'clean up' the southern provinces before NATO take over command... The coalition's strategy varies little and depends for the most part on America's overwhelming firepower. Communiqués follow one another, with NGO's pointing to the number of civilian deaths..." Jaulmes quotes an Afghan policeman: "There is increasing resentment against the Americans..." and a teacher: "When they say they have killed Taliban, it is generally not true. The dead are tallied as Taliban, but the real Taliban are at large..."

In Le Monde, former French Ambassador to Washington, Francois Bujon de l'Estang, President of Citigroup, France, pens an op-ed entitled "Paris, the Future Financial Capital of the World" in which he demonstrates that the NYSE-Euronext merger is a positive step for the French stock exchange, with no danger of seeing the Sarbanes-Oxley legislation imposed on European companies.

La Croix devotes its lead and several stories to the teaching of Islam by women in Morocco, but also in other Muslim countries, as a way to counter fundamentalism. France's Muslim community, according to La Croix, sees such initiatives as positive steps.

(C) SUPPORTING TEXT/BLOCK QUOTES:

Situation in Occupied Territories

"Peace as Target"

Bernard Guetta on government-run France Inter radio (06/27): "It is eminently clear that peace was scoring points. Hence the kidnapping, which is targeting neither the soldier nor the Israeli army. The target is the glimmer of peace... The difficult and tense negotiations within the different Palestinian factions were about to succeed... Never, since the Oslo accords, had peace had such a chance... But the Palestinian extremists could not accept the idea of a compromise... A kidnapping was a sure way of triggering the cycle of violence. Israeli troops are ready to enter territories recently evacuated with the risk of causing many casualties. Unless Abbas and the Hamas ministers are able to find the Israeli soldier before it is too late. This scenario, the optimistic one, would bring about a rapprochement among the Palestinian factions. All is not lost, but the chances for success are limited."

"Israel Threatens to Use Force"

Patrick Saint-Paul in right-of-center Le Figaro (06/27): "The Gaza Strip is a small territory which the Israelis know well. Hamas activists know they cannot hold out for long with an Israeli hostage. The pragmatists hope to avoid a bloody and costly military operation and to save their government by liberating the Israeli soldier. But no one knows whether Israel will allow this dangerous precedent... Israeli soldiers have traditionally been trained to launch firepower whenever a soldier is held hostage, regardless of the implications for the hostage."

Conflict Management - North Korea - Iran

"Predicting the Wars of the 21st Century"

Jacques Hubert-Rodier in right-of-center Les Echos (06/27): "The crisis with North Korea and Iran is coming to a head. Even China claims to be worried by Pyongyang's nuclear threats. Arab nations are for their part concerned about Iran's desire for power... For the time being the escalation is only verbal, with Washington calling for a diplomatic approach... But military options have been circulating in the U.S., and now Washington wants to deploy Patriots in Japan... Mired in Iraq, today's America is not the America of 2003... Iran and North Korea's objectives are not the same... These nuclear proliferation crises demonstrate to what extent it has been impossible to reap the 'dividends of peace...' America is navigating in 'un-chartered waters,' as new non-state players appear, such as al-Qaeda... Hostilities around the world are diminishing thanks to international peacekeeping operations. But the world remains a dangerous place nonetheless... Four years later, Afghanistan is not pacified... Nations need to be on the lookout and anticipate: while France's predictions about Iraq were accurate, France did not foresee Yugoslavia's breakup, while the U.S. had pretty much anticipated it. This speaks in favor of a closer international cooperation in matters of prediction and prevention. Post 9/11 has led to a closer cooperation in fighting terrorism between the U.S. and France, including at the worst of our relationship. But there is always a major unknown: how the actors themselves will react. Iraq is a case in point: the war could have been avoided. As in the case of Iraq, the crises with Iran and North Korea will depend on the attitude of the major powers, but also on the nations' leaders themselves and the internal situation. Neither Ahmadinejad nor Kim Jong-il are predictable." STAPLETON